

Naval War College Review

Volume 32

Number 5 *July-August*

Article 12

1979

Soviet Strategy for Nuclear War

Renita Fry

Joseph D. Douglass Jr.

Amoretta Haeber

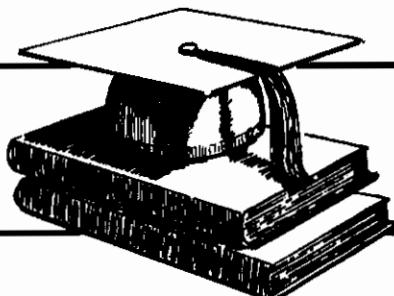
Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Fry, Renita; Douglass, Joseph D. Jr.; and Haeber, Amoretta (1979) "Soviet Strategy for Nuclear War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 32 : No. 5 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol32/iss5/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.



PROFESSIONAL READING

BOOK REVIEWS

Douglass, Joseph D., Jr., and Amoretta Hoeber. *Soviet Strategy for Nuclear War*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979. 138pp.

The subject of Soviet strategic thinking is one that is very easy to handle badly. There are numerous pitfalls of conceptual error, inadequate evidence or being bound to traditional interpretations that have caught many analysts who have attempted to deal with aspects of the subject. In addition, deciphering what is meant by Soviet pronouncements requires both familiarity with the nature of Soviet literature and devotion of extensive time to exhaustive research. In this book Joseph Douglass and Amoretta Hoeber appear to have avoided most of the pitfalls and to have capitalized on their competence in handling Soviet materials. For these contributions alone, the book should be welcomed as a valuable analysis.

The book is very tightly organized, flowing logically from discussion of Soviet objectives in a nuclear war (the conditions of victory), to Soviet perceptions of the phases of war and how to prepare for and operate in each, through examination of who decides when to engage in a war and how that decision might be reached. In some of these sections the material presented is fairly familiar. However, the fact that the authors are reaffirming familiar tenets does not detract from the lucidity of their presentation. Of even greater interest are the instances in which the

authors explore less widely publicized areas of Soviet thinking. For example, in their discussion of the conduct of nuclear war, the authors postulate the possible existence of a reserve of nuclear forces similar to the ground forces reserve. In Soviet planning, reserves hold potent historical significance because of their role in WW II. Quite possibly the idea of a complete reserve has been carried over and applied to the missile forces. Because the function of reserves is to remain concealed and to survive the first attack, the authors suggest that there may be second and third echelon missile forces not evident to the West. There also may be coherent plans for the rebuilding of the Strategic Missile Forces even as the war proceeds. If the authors' analysis of Soviet references to the need for reserves is correct, then parts of Western strategy, and particularly Western positions on arms control, would require reworking. Similar raisings of untraditional ideas are the authors' presentation of civil defense as a war tactic rather than a protective measure, of the possibility of early use of Soviet SLBMs as the most efficient means of hitting Western C³ elements, or the unlikelihood in Soviet strategy of a negotiated settlement of nuclear war. In each case it might be possible to disagree with ideas offered by Douglass and Hoeber but these uncommon interpretations make their study challenging.

Stylistically, the work has three significant advantages. First, it is extensively documented. Citations from 1

PROFESSIONAL READING 105

Soviet sources are not so numerous as to interrupt a reader's thought process (although there are a few cases in which one citation might have sufficed instead of three) but are essential to understanding what backs up the authors presentation. Closely related to a well balanced documentation is the book's careful recognition of gaps in evidence. The question of proof is always present when drawing from Soviet sources. The authors do not gloss over a problem by making categorical judgments where the evidence may be wobbly. For example, they close the section on the possibility of strategic reserves by stating that it is not possible to show that such reserves exist; rather, the literature clearly lays the basis for its existence both in principle and in logic. This willingness to recognize areas of insufficient "proof" is a mark of intellectual honesty that characterizes a truly unbiased analysis. Finally, it is clear in the later sections of the book that both writers can handle the semantic distinctions of internal Soviet communication that are familiar in academic circles but less so in policy circles. This skill is particularly evident in their evaluation of source materials (*Voyennaya Mysl*, for example) and in their discussion of texts relating to Soviet acceptance of the concept of first strike.

On the basis of both content and style, then, Mr. Douglass and Ms. Hoeber have given us a stimulating addition to our understanding of the differences between our own and Soviet strategic thinking and of the areas that remain to be explored.

RENITA FRY

Dupuy, Trevor N. *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars 1947-1974*, New York: Harper & Row, 1978. 795pp

Another encyclopedic work by veteran military historian Col. Trevor N. Dupuy is a welcome event for students of military history. Dupuy is thoughtful

and objective and this book displays throughout the intellectual honesty of the scholar and the objectivity of a professional with no ox to gore. With his many friends in Israel and the Arab countries, Colonel Dupuy can add the personal insights of many veterans of Middle East combat to his own through analysis of engagements, battles, and campaigns. The result is an invaluable one-volume analysis of a series of tragic wars, wars that have implications for any "near-term" war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Like the Dan Horowitz and Edward Luttwak book, *The Israeli Army, Elusive Victory* traces the development of the modern Israeli Defense Force through its antecedents of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973. Unlike the *Israeli Army*, *Elusive Victory* details the development of armies and doctrines of all the antagonists, something resembling a "net assessment" in what shapes up to be a modern "30 years(?) War." While the Israeli Army and Air Force have been remarkably successful during this period, a focus on Zahal alone, which the Horowitz and Luttwak book provides, robs the reader of many important lessons to be relearned from the Arab experience. As there seems to be little analysis of modern Arab armies that is not classified or polemic, *Elusive Victory* provides a readily available and needed companion to a very good *The Israeli Army*. Additionally, *Elusive Victory* adds a few years perspective to the time immediately after the 1973 war when *The Israeli Army* was written. This is not to say that the conclusions of Horowitz and Luttwak are wrong, especially with respect to the 1973 war, but that Dupuy has the advantage of a more relaxed perspective and a more rational atmosphere. Nor is Dupuy trying to define an evolution of thinking in any one army; there is no overt attempt to focus upon specific operational methods as they work themselves out from theory to reality (an instruc-